Poetry and Literature Connections

Sometimes writers are inspired by other writers, and may reference famous literature in their works. For example, the play, A Raisin in the Sun, by Lorraine Hansberry was influenced by Langston Hughes’s poem, “Harlem,” which starts with the lines, “What happens to a dream deferred? Does it dry up like a raisin in the sun?”

1. What are these lines mean in your own words? What is the message of the lines?
2. Whose dreams are deferred in the play?
3. What are those dreams in the play?
4. Whose dreams have dried up in the play?
5. How do the poem and the play have a shared message?

Now, working with a partner, consider the following Langston Hughes poem, “Minstrel Man,” and think about how it relates to Dreams from My Father.

“Minstrel Man” by Langston Hughes

Because my mouth  
Is wide with laughter  
And my throat  
Is deep with song,   
You do not think   
I suffer after  
I have held my pain  
So long?  
  
Because my mouth   
Is wide with laughter,   
You do not hear  
My inner cry?   
Because my feet  
Are gay with dancing,   
You do not know   
I die?

1. What is this poem about in your own words? What is the message of the poem?
2. What is the reason why the audience does not think that the man is suffering?
3. What is the reason why the audience does not hear his inner cry?
4. What scenes in *Dreams for My Father* relate to this poem (see if you can find 2 or 3)?
5. How do the scenes relate to the poem? What is the shared message?

For our NEXT WRITING PROJECT (Due March 20th) you will use poems by Langston Hughes to connect to various scenes in Barack Obama’s memoir and make a graphic novel depicting how poetry, literature, art, and internal monologue can mix together to create a strong message. For this project, you will focus on Obama’s character transformation and the experiences that shape his identity.

To prepare for this project, you will work with partners to evaluate an assigned poem by Langston Hughes and brainstorm what parts of the book the poem reminds you of, and what similar message the two works of literature have. Read the poem with your group and talk about it. Then each person in the group should complete the following questions for homework.

**Answer the following questions on your own.**

1. What is this poem about?

2. What scenes in Dreams from My Father are similar to this poem? Identify three in various chapters:

a.

b.

c.

3. How do the scenes from the book have a shared message from the poem?

4. What QUOTES from the book remind you of QUOTES from the poem?

a.

b

c.